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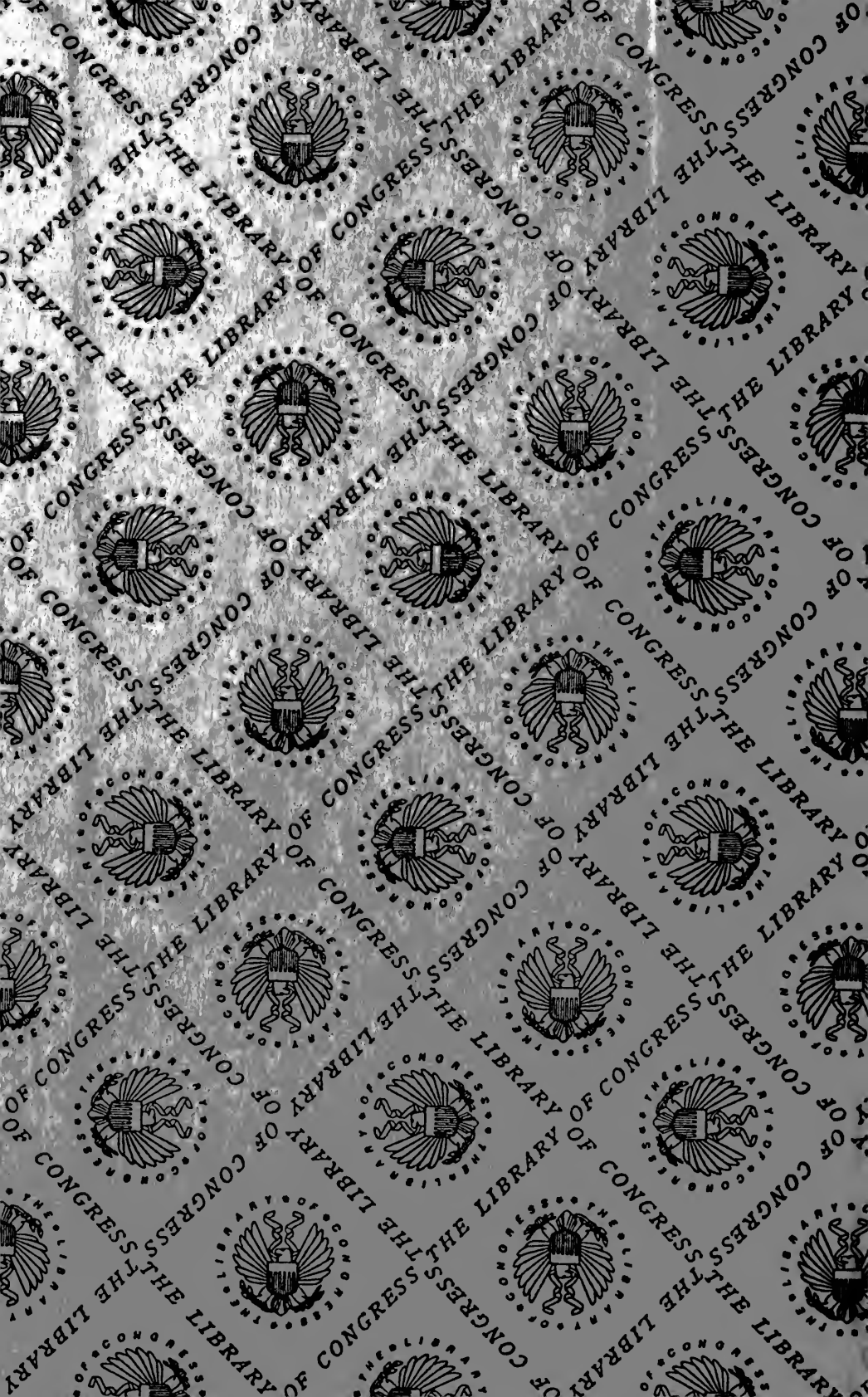
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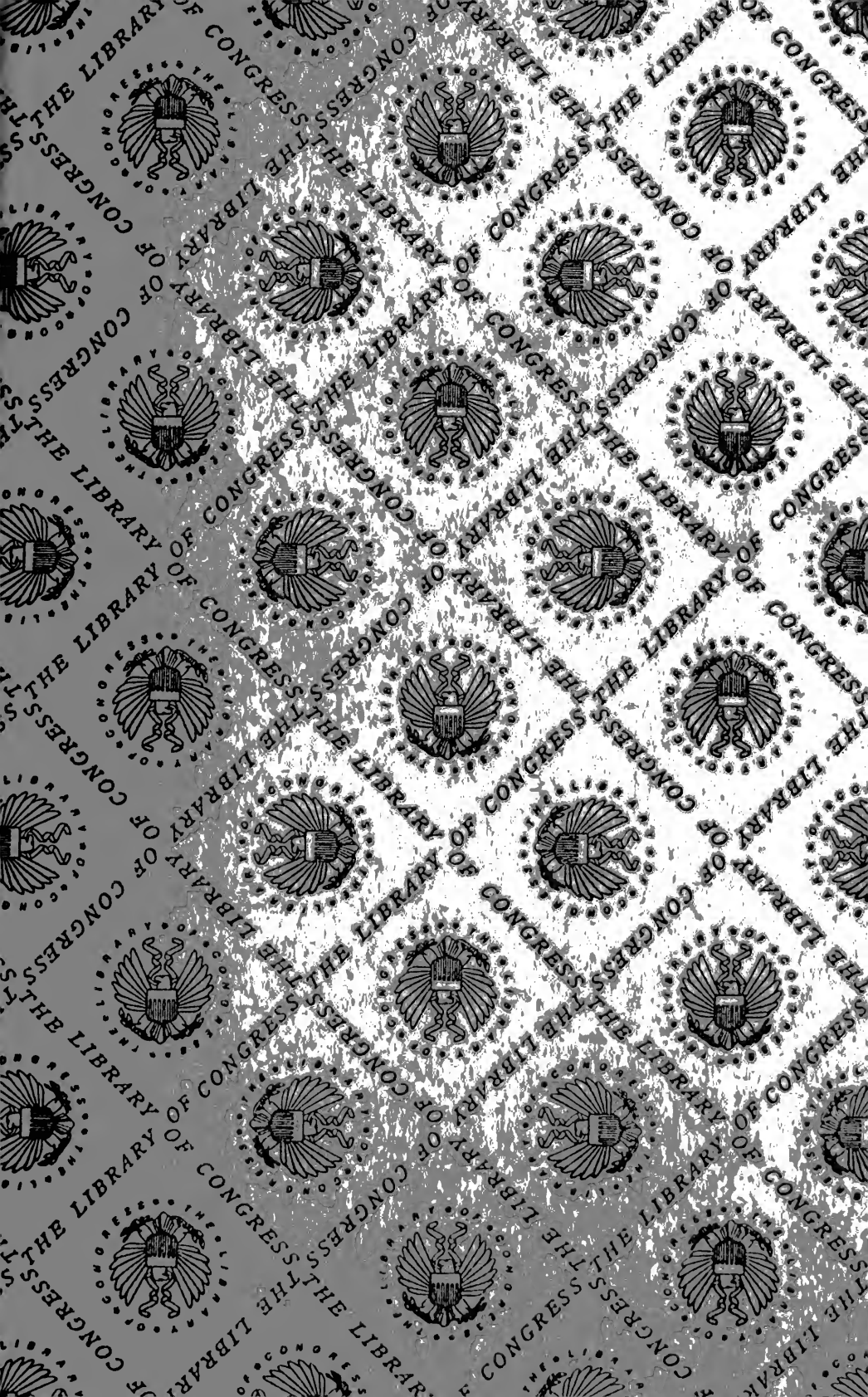
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THE LAST KNIGHT
AND OTHER POEMS

THE LAST KNIGHT

AND OTHER POEMS

BY
THEODORE MAYNARD



NEW YORK
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

PR 6025
. A95L3
1921

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FEB -5 1921

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TO
MY MOTHER

To you I owe
The blood of a Gael,
The laughter I wear
As a coat of mail.

To you I owe
My gift of scorn,
That I took from you
On the day I was born.

To you I owe
My strength of belief—
Though the credo I utter
Has brought you grief.

To you I owe
My songs, each one;
For you hushed with music
Your little son.

These poems were first published by the following journals, and are now reprinted by the courtesy of their respective editors:

In England: *The New Witness*, *The New Age*, *The Month*, *The English Review*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Poetry Review*, *Today*, *Studies*, *Vision*, *Blackfriar's*, *The Englishman*, *A Miscellany of Poetry*, 1919.

In the United States: *The North American Review*, *The Catholic World*, *America*, *The Lyric*, *Harper's Magazine*, *The Rosary Magazine*, *The Outlook*, *A Miscellany of Poetry*, 1919.

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THE LAST KNIGHT
AND OTHER POEMS

PART I

LAUS DEO!

PRAISE! that when thick night circled over me
In chaos ere my time or world began,
Thy finger shaped my body cunningly,
Thy thought conceived me ere I was a man!
Thy Spirit breathed upon me in the dark
Wherein I strangely grew,
Bestowing glowing powers to the spark
The mouth of heaven blew!

Praise! that a babe I leapt upon the world
Spread at my feet in its magnificence,
With trees as giants, flowers as flags unfurled,
And rains as diamonds in their excellence!
Praise! for the solemn splendour of surprise
That came with breaking day;
For all the ranks of stars that met my eyes
When sunset burned away!

Praise! that there burst on my unfolding heart
The coloured radiance of leafy June,
With choirs of song-birds perfected in art,
And nightingales beneath the summer moon—
Praise! that this beauty, an unravished bride
Doth hold her lover still;

LAUS DEO!

Doth hide and beckon, laugh at me, and hide
Upon each grassy hill.

Praise! that I know the dear capricious sky
In every infinitely varied mood,—
Yet under her maternal wings can lie
The smallest chick among her countless brood!
Praise! that I hear the strong winds wildly race
Their chariots on the sea,
But feel them lift my hair and stroke my face
Softly and tenderly!

Praise! for the joy and gladness Thou didst send
When I have sat in gracious fellowship
In twilight for an evening with a friend,
When wine and magic entered at the lip!
For laughter which the fates can overthrow
Thy mercy doth accord—
To Thee, who didst my godlike joy bestow,
I lift my glass, O Lord!

Praise! that a lady leaning from her height,
A lady pitiful, a tender maid,
A queen majestic unto my sight,
Spoke words of love to me, and sweetly laid

LAUS DEO!

Her hand within my own unworthy hand!
 (Rise, soul, to greet thy guest,
Mysterious love, whom none shall understand,
 Though love be all confessed!)

Praise! that upon my bent and bleeding back
 Was stretched some share of Thy redeeming
 cross,
Some poverty as largess for my lack,
 Some loss that shall prevent my utter loss!
Praise! that thou gavest me to keep joy sweet
 The sanguine salt of pain!
Praise! for the weariness of questing feet
 That else might quest in vain!

THE LAST KNIGHT

I ride, I ride, with my memories of Avalon,
The last of the hundred knights that were my
peers,
With the jesting and the jousting and the glory of
the tournaments,
The laughter of the ladies ringing in my ears.

But I have made an end of all my challenges;
The gallant days have gone beyond recall—
Although I ride through the furthest bounds of
Heathenesse,
Silence and the sleep of death enwrap them all.

Why should they stir, when all the lords of Chris-
tendom,
Save I, are sealed beneath the heavy stone?
Why should they shout from the turrets of their
citadels
At one old fool who rides the world alone?

Better, by God, were their ancient hate and arro-
gance—
Our churches wrecked, and our fruitful fields
laid bare;

THE LAST KNIGHT

The ambush and the sortie and the charges of our
chivalry,
The clangour of the battlefields that filled the
air!

But now they have conquered. In a cold and cruel
quietness

They hold their peace with a scorn too deep
for scorn!

I ride and I ride—but this dotard of a paladin
Can bring no answer to his angry horn.

Could I find a man with belief enough for blas-
phemy,

I would love him well for his hatred of my
creed.

But the minds of men are rotted with their toler-
ance,

And doubt eats their wills like a hungry weed!

I ride, I ride—for until a paynim fight with me,

My weary bones shall never find their grave.

Though rest be sweet I can never have a resting-
place

Until my sword is red with a stroke it gave.

THE LAST KNIGHT

Perhaps I shall find it—as a man finds fairyland—
And see it glimmering at the fall of eve,
Perhaps a paynim knight will answer to my chal-
lenging,
And men will die for the lie that they believe.

That would be something! For if I could but see
again
A faith, though false,—then the true would
surely thrive,
And doubt give way to dogma, and truth come to
be again
Passionate and lovely in a soul alive!

THE SCIMITAR

THIS is a scimitar
By a magician made,
Wrought in a cavern underground:
Upon its glistening blade
Are graven the praise of Mahound
And the ninety-nine names of God;
Set in the handle of jade
Trembles a blood-red star—
Who gazes that jewel in
Grows mightier far than sin,
For the jewel's holding gives
Lordship of earth and air;
And the monstrous genii come,
At the Caliph's clap or nod,
To bring him a houri fair
To add to his thousand wives.

But more—if his pleasure tires,
Black eunuchs, fearful and dumb,
Must whip their bow-strings out
To wind round that slender throat,
Which the Caliph no longer desires.
They shall press out its silver note
And tie her white body about

THE SCIMITAR

With smooth and silken cords—
For this, for this was the sword's
Secret fashioning underground,
For this the praise of Mahound
And the ninety-nine names of God—
To give to the Caliph's nod
Such marvellous potency
Through that jewel of destiny.

THE SWORD

TO that dear garden, shut since Adam fell,
Grown o'er with moss and fern and ivied
tree,

No man shall dare to pass the sentinel
Who bears the sword of God's dread chivalry.

Within those forests crazy and decayed
No panther tracks her game or rears her young;
No bird from Paradise has ever strayed
To build its nest the blessed boughs among.

A fountain of pure silence, dead as stone,
Fixed in its leap and frozen in cascade,
Stands in the centre—since a man alone
Lost his young innocence and grew afraid.

Wings there no longer rustle in the brake;
Save tangled weeds there grow no living things:
Since Eve learned good and evil from the snake
Above the roof of heaven a sword still swings.

Yet some have cut a path through bush and brier,
And blown a horn in challenge at the gate—
Only to see as end of their desire,
A sword made sharp, a garden desolate.

THE SWORD

Wearied their woes through many questing years,
While red rust ate their armour and their
shields—

Only to find the grass as tall as spears
And that archangel who, in guarding, seals.

This much is given such an one to hold,
Though he be frustrate and denied the grace
To cross the door—a sword made bright and cold,
And anger blazing strongly on his face.

This shall he keep as comfort from his Lord,
Who seeing Eden could not enter in,
The accolade from His indignant sword,
The spurs, the crest, the name of Paladin!

ST. GEORGE

HE reins his horse and listens. The risen lark
sings over

The edge of a cloud in a sky washed clean
with dew.

This is the England he knew of springing grass
and clover,

This is the England he knew.

Earth makes her familiar gesture. The trees into
pondage

Foam like frozen fountains released, but spill
no green.

Blue-bells from ancient roots, oblivious of recent
frondage

Are crowding the trees between.

He sits stock-still in his saddle. Holding his spear
he listens,

Hearing in happy silence the lyric of a bird.

The early morning sun on a million dew-points
glistens . . .

The Knight has not spoken or stirred.

ST. GEORGE

For here contentment holds him within her quiet
places:

All else he shall find will be evil, but here is
good;

Hearts that are cold he shall find, and cruel or
sullen faces,

Far away from the leafy wood.

Whinnies his horse to be gone; but the knight re-
luctant lingers

Where thin mist faintly rises, where no factory-
shafts appear.

His love clings close to ground; but his lips grow
tight and his fingers

Grow tighter around his spear.

When so much else had changed had these not
remained unchanging

The secret streams, the greenwood, each little
irregular field,

With memories of Robin Hood and the Lincoln
Jackets ranging—

He had cast aside his shield.

Though the rich have taken bribes, and the poor
have followed blindly

ST. GEORGE

The bidding of alien lords, and are minding
their engines' wheels;
Though colour slowly fades from their lives—
their lives are kindly,
Despite the chains at their heels.

"Were it not so," thought the knight, "The
myriad-headed dragon
Should eat this England up, while I held my
angry hand.
But, by God, I hope for better things, for farm
and fair and flagon—
And a sword to save this land!"

He reins his horse and listens. The risen lark
sings over
The edge of a cloud in a sky washed clean with
dew.
This is the England he knew of springing grass
and clover,
This is the England he knew.

NIGHT

(i)

BEFORE the onslaught of the night the day,
Desperately guarding his last stronghold,
died

Among the flaming hills, where ray on ray

Flickered and fell like Lucifer in pride.

Then silent clamour filled the heights of heaven

With shouts of colour the eyes can see, and
cheers

Of painted music, as the planets seven

Bore down the failing twilight with their spears.

And while the winds made mournful requiem

Over that battlefield heroical,

Chaunting slain captains and the deeds of them—

The night rode by upon the moon with all

The armies of the stars in slow procession,

Taking the earth and skies for her possession.

NIGHT

(ii)

NOT always with such pomp does night descend

Winged powerfully with gold and crimson
clouds;

But when day makes her treasonable end

Leads on, not stars, but evil shapes in crowds.

Hobgoblins, witches, ghosts beneath the cover

Of this wide leaden dome contrive their charms

To spoil the blessed dreams of each sweet lover

Asleep with his sweet lover in his arms.

The wicked night her invitation utters

To lost souls for abominable carouse;

A wet and wailing wind between the shutters,

Beneath the door and through the keyhole
blows;

Hands pull the curtains; and the candle gutters;

And children scream for terror in the house.

THE MARRIAGE OF THE DAWN

A WAKEN! cast away the smell of sleep
Out of your nostrils! To the narrow room
Shuttered by death, let in the wide
Bright sunlight from the deep
Where Dawn is waiting lovely as a bride!
Rise up, rise up my soul, and go to meet
The shy and lingering hurry of her feet,
Moving to greet the longing of her groom!

Awaken to that wonder and your joy!
The cerements that bound your mind are gone,
Melted before the rising light.
Now mightily employ
Your powers to their exultant task; gird on
The shining sword of your great ecstasy,
Before whose edge the legioned glooms must be
Turned utterly to swift precipitous flight.

Thus shall you win your wedding with your fair—
Bring garlands from the woods, and sweetly fill
Your hair with yellow flowers, array
Your body and prepare
Its pomp with care for this its nuptial day—
For heralded with bells Dawn comes to you,

THE MARRIAGE OF THE DAWN

Leading along her merry retinue

Laughing and dancing with her down the hill.

Upon the grassy slopes beneath the sky

Your hands shall build your rosy marriage bed;

The young sun from the rim of heaven

Shall bless you as you lie

Gilded with glory while your love is given.

Pluck tenderly and freely of delight

In this surrender, while no folds of night

Hang, specked with gold, a canopy o'erhead.

But press your wooing ardently and soon,

While still on leaf and petal shines the dew,

While love is coy and magical;

Tween daybreak and the noon

Few are the joyous moments that will fall

Apt for the capture of the virgin heart

Of Dawn, who growing old, must then depart

And wrench your rapture utterly from you.

A fleeting splendour! How should there endure

A prolongation of your burning zest?

But turn and seize love while it last;

When Time's so insecure,

THE MARRIAGE OF THE DAWN

Then ravish the instant ere that it be passed!
The noonday lifts herself above the world—
Let limbs cling closer, soon to be uncurled—
Kiss, while you may, her lips and hair and
breast!

SUN

SLEEPER in primal darkness, who first heard
God break eternal silence with a word,
That stirred the chaos into form and flame;
That clove the day from night; that gave a name
In turn to every torch-enkindled star—

Eldest brother, thou, to all things that are!
Beneath thy ray, revealed in light and shade,
Water took wings; the firmament was made;
And earth, arising out of ocean, bore
Fruit trees whose seed lies at the fruit's deep core.
And thou and thy sweeter sister, Moon, were
given

Dominion o'er the burning lamps of heaven,
Which mark the seasons and which pull the tides
And hold the line where day from night divides.

Warmed through, the great sea monsters spouted
foam;

Fish swam the seas; the wild birds built a home;
The long procession of the beasts began;
And God in His Own image created man.

Thy raging anger through the cosmos sheds
A benediction on a billion heads.

Thine is the hearth at which creation stands,

SUN

Toasting before thy fire its sides and hands.
Thy universal domesticity
Comforts the purring cat, the apple tree,
The dragon fly and all things that draw life
As equally as Adam and his wife.

When the last frozen fountain is released,
And the last harvest of the world increased
By thy beneficence; when last there dies
Sunset as an emperor upon the skies;
When neither feeble nor with breast grown cold,
Thou perish as the prophet has foretold—
Washed over and drowned in dreadful seas of
blood—

And earth is drenched with fire as with a flood:
If (as I think may be) each man may take
Some relic of the sun . . . for her dear sake
I'll choose that shaft of light she used to wear
On sunny days amid her mortal hair.

SUMMER RAIN

I—who have tried to learn
How I could find
Everywhere marks of her
Spirit and mind;
How she is mingled with
Earth, to the water kith,
How the bright sparks of her
Fly on the wind—

Saw her, where wet leaves sway
Under the breeze
Fall with the faltering
Light through the trees;
Fall where wild grasses lift
Flowers like skies adrift—
Touching and altering
All the eye sees.

Through the drenched undergrowth
Solitude brings
Silence's lyrical
Quivering strings.
Here where no footsteps stir
Solitude sings of her;

SUMMER RAIN.

Silence—a miracle!—

Sings of her, sings.

Thrilled, in the distance,

The note of a bird

Faintly—a lonely sound!—

Was it her word

Cried in the rain-washed wood?

Deep in the grass I stood

Hoarding the only sound

That my heart heard.

EARTH'S GREEN WAYS

I WANDER in the earth's green ways, and
stare

With steady happiness at all my finding,
Intent and dumb . . . A heavy crown of care
Lifted from off my head. A chain was binding
My feet, lest they should go; a mist was blind-
ing

My eyes, lest they should see the beauty there—

Cows in the rushes, and the river winding,
The nimble squirrel clambering his stair.

Here will I linger on until the amorous

Earth shall entreat her lover, night, to keep
His promised tryst. Descending, he will steep
Her heart in wonder; and in moonlight glamor-
ous

Lull watchful men and beasts and birds
asleep—
Till day-dawn glimmers and the cocks grow clam-
orous.

LEGEND

"No man dare take of that fruit for it is a thing of fairie."
—MANDEVILLE'S TRAVELS.

I WALKED within my garden
Under the sun's strong ray,
When the turbaned merchants passed me
As they journeyed to Cathay.

They passed me with goblin camels
Coal black and white as milk,
Carrying bales of richest spices
And diamonds and furs and silk;

Carrying blood-red jewels
For the gold of the great queen's hair
And glittering coats of silver
For the Chan himself to wear.

The crafty merchants passed me
With faces eager and thin
To the far and fabulous Indies
Where a fabulous wealth they win.

They went through the lanes of England,
There in the strong sunlight—
Those dim and ghostly creatures
Who should only have walked by night.

LEGEND

And I ran beside the caravan,
As it journeyed on and on,
Until we reached the bounds of the earth
In the country of Prester John.

From the hill's familiar summit,
Where the road swerves down to the right,
The shining city of Prester John
Lay naked to the sight.

At the close of an hour's long travel,
At the foot of the quiet lane,
Palaces and pinnacles
Shot upwards from the plain.

And the little stream ran aquiver
With jewels to the brim,
Making a lordly flood for the sea
That shone at the world's rim.

It flowed 'twixt the trees of that country,
Ten thousand leagues and more
From the spot where I met the merchants
Passing my own oak door.

The marvellous birds of that country
In the leafage on either hand

LEGEND

Sang, while the river glittered
And glided to the sea of sand.

And the fruit upon the branches
Hung thick and ruddy and sweeten—
But because it was a thing of fairie
I dared not eat.

Because it was a thing of fairie
And I but a mortal man,
A sudden fear gave wings to my feet
And from that land I ran.

I ran from the country of Prester John
That sparkled in the light,
Till the cool green hedge of my garden
Came again in sight.

I saw in my quiet garden
The apples hang ripe on the bough,
And the rows of dear and friendly flowers
That in my garden grow.

And on the kindly roof of my house
Was cast no enchanted thing
Nor any spell, but only mystery
For the heart's comforting.

LEGEND

And as one rose up to greet me—
 Than the Chan's youngest daughter more
 fair—
The sun released an arrow
 That alighted amidst her hair.

VAGABONDAGE

DUSTY of shoes and dented of hat—
Beggars—we knock on this door and that;
Beggars whose bodies are weary and old
We whimper for shelter, shut out in the cold:
Kind folk, peep through your windows and see
The rags of our sorrowful beggary!

An ancient madness has driven us forth
To East and West and South and North—
Though gold upon our palms has lain thick
Of men and of cities our hearts have grown sick,
Of narrow skies and of dust and of din—
Lift up the latch and let us come in!
Draw back the bolts and the stout stiff bars
For vagabonds homeless beneath the stars!
We fain would find a welcome to sit
Where the glowworm's friendly lantern is lit . . .
To the fellowship of fur and of wing
Our sorrowful ditty we sing:

*We hear not a word that is spoken
Under the greenwood tree;—
No sound of that jovial laughter,
That feasting and revelry!*

VAGABONDAGE

*The great roots jest together
Deep in the ruddy earth,
But never a lonely mortal
Is partner to that mirth.*

*For the secretive hills are jealous
Lest man should overhear,
And they guard their hoary fables
From every human ear.*

*Though crickets sing in the twilight
And larks ascend in the morn,
No whisper of their songs' meaning
Ever comes to the women-born.*

*For this we have given up kinsfolk
And household and household fire,
To find in the silver house of the snail
The end of our desire.*

*But though men were scornful and bitter
And pitiless of face—
O small folk, are you more ready
To give us a resting place?*

VAGABONDAGE

Beggars with bellies drawn tightly in
We seek our nightly shelter to win;
Yet no beast lifts a kindly eye
To welcome such vagabonds passing by.
If you'll give us a crust of your fairy bread
And a petal of dew, we'll be comforted—
But no living thing will answer the door
Though we tramp and trudge the wide world o'er!

ENCHANTMENT

BECAUSE my childhood only knew
The burning sands and white,
Where cactus and palmyra grew
In bright and bitter light—

That day the English cliffs were seen,
With meadows cool and kind
All covered with the grass so green,
Comes often to my mind.

A little Anglo-Indian boy
The Dorset field I trod,
Beholding buttercups with joy
And daisies meek like God.

I found, a little older grown,
In Surrey woods of pine
A stranger thing to keep and own
Than that young zest of mine.

A wind that smote me as I sat,
With buffets strong and sharp,
When the wind of love awoke thereat
To play my heart as a harp.

ENCHANTMENT

But yet those vales are not so dear,
As where the gales are loud
And skies are iron and austere
From Cirencester ¹ to Stroud.

Where little houses built of stone
In crowded hamlets stand,
Because they fear to stand alone
In that enchanted land.

My mind with pain and happiness,
In thinking on it, fills
Where the grave silence comes to bless
The everlasting hills.

¹ Locally pronounced Cicester.

SUNDAY MORNING AT MARLOW

LAST night as I came up the lane
Towards the house that's mine,
I saw the thin young moon again
Among the planets shine.

Between the trees that lined my way
A wintry whisper stirred
I knew the frost would wake ere day
Like some sweet early bird.

I knew the fingers of the mist
Would falter in their hold
When once a glowing sun had kissed
A world of glowing cold.

And now as I go up the hills
This morning after Mass,
I see how powdered silver fills
The rolling fields of grass.

I hear below me as I climb
The hills where quiet dwells
A music of recurrent rhyme
And rhythm from the bells.

SUNDAY MORNING AT MARLOW

It trembles on the frosty air
 Among the frosty woods,
Far off, far off and silver clear
 Among my solitudes.

HIGHWAYMAN'S SONG

WHILE a horse is left in stable;
While I've pistols and a sword,—
Does the Sheriff think he's able
For to swing me on a cord?
While a woman's worth the winning;
While there's wine that's fit to drink;
While there's still delight in sinning
I'll be safe enough, I think!

If at last the runners catch me
With my pockets stuffed with gold—
At the least when they dispatch me,
I'll be saved from growing old.
All my doxies will be crying
As I mount the gallows-stairs—
That's a good death to be dying;
I can spare the Parson's prayers!

THE HEAVENLY TAVERN

(Sung by the exile in America)

I FOUND in the inn upon the hill
An ale which body and soul can fill,
Ale as strong as the drinkers who sit
Drinking and praising the glory of it.

I drank a flagon, I drank a pot;
I treated the company, paid the shot,
And hearty and happy, a man content,
I gave them my blessing and out I went.

I've discovered that inn in many a town
With its score of good fellows whom nothing
can drown—
And we've sometimes sat there till the morn-
ing was pink
And nothing was left in the house to drink.

Whene'er I walked singing along the lane
I found that mystical inn again.
Whatever the village, whatever the shire—
The same jolly toppers beside the same fire!

THE HEAVENLY TAVERN

But when I went sailing across the sea—
Alas! that inn didn't travel with me!
I've left it and lost it . . . oh, where shall I
 find
Any comfort of body or rapture of mind?

A SONG OF DRUNKEN WEATHER

ALL night the rain came down amain,
A raging, drunken storm,
But we sat snug with fire and mug
That kept us safe and warm.
Such weather hardly can be mended
When drinking is the thing intended;
And such a night too soon is ended
That kept us safe and warm.

We left the inn where men can win
A kindness born of ale,
And with hearts made wise and merry eyes
Went out into the gale.
With joy between us like a tether
We met the jolly English weather,
In which the sun and wind together
Go out to make a gale.

We need not grieve the beer we leave
Behind us in the bar;
For every tree is drunk, and we
Are even as they are.
Though all must reel and some go under,
We're not so drunk but we can wonder

A SONG OF DRUNKEN WEATHER

To hear a drinking song like thunder
About us where we are.

We do not shrink to take our drink,
And neither do the hills
Who drank all night for their delight
The flagons heaven fills.

But nights of rain last not for ever;
We're full as is the flooding river—
So thank our God the great drink giver,
For all the pots He fills!

RAHAB

I ONLY know that in an hour I lost
All worth the saving,
That life lies barren as a land in frost
With bleak winds raving.

And though kings kiss me wildly on the lips
And load my fingers.
They cannot pay me for my joy's eclipse
Where no light lingers.

You give me gold! But is that recompense,
Sweet lord and lover?
For that which I have given—my innocence?
Will you recover

The happiness I had—forever gone
Since your eyes found me—
Walking my lonely gardens all alone,
My dreams around me?

But I may walk the leafy ways no more
Of those dear gardens. . . .
The door is shut. I cannot find the door. . . .
And my heart hardens.

Desire, you said, would be a steady glow
(Do you remember?)

RAHAB

Kneel down again, and stretch your cheeks, and
blow

The failing ember !

The blaze is still alive? Let's hope the fire,

Sweet lord and lover,

Of Hell will warm us better than desire

When life is over !

O FELIX CULPA!

THEN gazed the wild-wood dumb with awe,
 Staring with eyeballs open wide
On one grown conscious of a law
 And lifted suddenly to pride.

The apex of creation in
 His shame, creation, envious sees—
Magnificently robed with sin,
 Knowing the roots of mysteries.

Hot-footed hurrying through the immense
 The winds their happy tidings tell,
That man, exchanging innocence—
 And gladly—for the fires of hell

Proves his long-boasted power to choose,
 To leave the good and take the ill;
Free, with his soul to save or lose,
 By warrant of its royal will.

But hidden from the awestruck eyes.
 Which see the sentenced rebels go,
Are those tall towers of Paradise
Where-through exultant rumours blow;

O FELIX CULPA!

Where seated at the council board
The Three-in-One debate Their plan,
The Incarnation of the Word,
The sorrows of the Son of Man.

CHIVALRY

THY Chivalrous love
Picked up my challenging glove,
Which I, being young,
Before Thy face had flung.

Not always thus
Is fortune given us;
That our bodies feel
The stroke of heavenly steel.

Happily cross
Swords with the Knight of Loss,
And be overborne
By His shield of blazoned thorn!

Suppose He turned
Away, while my anger burned;
And let me go,
Not deigning my overthrow!

But chivalry
Fought and defeated me;
And generous God
Smote, healing me with His rod.

PART II

AUBADE

HOW shall I waken love who sleeping lies?
How call him to the windows of your eyes?
How show him morning splendid with surprise?
How shall I waken love who sleeping lies?

How shall I waken love? He keeps his room
More strictly than a dead man keeps his tomb—
Though song-birds sing in gardens bright with
bloom—

How shall I waken love who sleeping lies?

How shall I waken love? He lay asleep
While in the skies the flocks of starry sheep
The pale moon shepherded. Are dreams so
deep?

How shall I waken love who sleeping lies?

How shall I waken love? If he awake
What lyrics through our desolate hearts will
break,

Which thirst and hunger for his lovely sake!
How shall I waken love who sleeping lies?

THE LOVER'S SILENCE

THE lute and starlight lyric—these belong
To love's novitiate of ardent song,
When underneath your listening window stood
A young man singing to your maidenhood.

Only to see your face against the glass
He waited patiently upon the grass;
Only to see the gold moon gild your hair
He sent his songs into the evening air.

But when to love's still chamber he has come,
His lyric lips with kisses are made dumb;
And beauty manifested rests above
The sweet and perfect silence of his love.

SECRETS

O LITTLE world, you are undone—
Your secrets flower on bush and tree,
They glimmer in the morning sun
And glitter on the sea!

From poet and philosopher
You lock your treasured secrets up,
Though shining on your breast you wear
The golden buttercup.

The clouds ride on from deep to deep
And stars are in the windy sky—
But who can at their beauty leap
And seize it fluttering by?

Oh, how can one who has not heard
The tender love she speaks to me,
Hear all the love that merry bird
Is singing on the tree?

Or how can one who has not seen
The look that yields her secret up
See, shining on the meadows green,
The golden buttercup.

DESIDERAVI

LEST, tortured by the world's strong sin,
Her little bruised heart should die—
Give her your heart to shelter in,
O earth and sky!

Kneel, sun, to clothe her round about
With rays to keep her body warm;
And, kind moon, shut the shadows out
That work her harm.

Yes, even shield her from my will's
Wild folly—hold her safe and close!—
For my rough hand in touching spills
Life from the rose.

But teach me, too, that I may learn
Your passion, classical and cool:
To me, who tremble so and burn,
Be pitiful!

IF EVER YOU COME TO DIE

IF ever you come to die
And the world should grow old—
Millions of years gone by
Singly as sheep to their fold—
I think our burnt star would renew
And enkindle to flame,
If a memory lived of you
Or if anyone spoke your name.

The thin grey dust of your urn,
The beauty asleep in your grave,
Would flower the fields, and return
Mighty in wind and wave,
The cuckoo repeat his call,
The chrysalis burst again,
And laughter happily fall
Through cities of buried men.

God knows whether or not
More than a carved stone shall tell—
Or a verse in a book forgot—
Of the lady I love so well:
But I know that, her story lost,
The earth must fade like a rose,

IF EVER YOU COME TO DIE

Ruined by endless frost
And gripped by pitiless snows
But even were joy all gone
As water from empty streams,
If a poet musing alone
Could fashion you out of his dreams;
Though you were only a bodiless sprite
Then, even then, for your sake
Would death grow alive with delight
And a lovely world awake.

DIRGE

IF on a day it should befall
That love must have her funeral;
And men weep tears that love is dead,
That never more her gracious head
Can turn to meet their eyes and hold
Their hearts with chains of silky gold;
That never more her hands can be
As dear as was virginity;
That in her coffin there is laid
Beauty, the body of a maid,
The body of one so piteous-sweet,
With candles burning at her feet
And cowed monks singing requiem. . . .

I think I would not go with them,
Her lordly lovers, to the place
Where lies that lovely mournful face,
That curving throat and marvelous hair
Under the sconces' yellow flare—
How shall a man be comforted
When love is dead, when love is dead?

But I would make my moan apart,
Keeping my dreams within my heart—

DIRGE

For guarded as a sepulchre
Shall be the house I built for her
Of silver spires and pinnacles
With carillons of mellow bells—
A house of song for her delight
Whose joy was as the strong sunlight—
But now love's ultimate word is said,
For love is dead, for love is dead!

But even should all hope be lost,
Some memory, like a thin white ghost,
Might stealthily move in midnight hours
Among those silent, sacred towers,
And glimmer on the moonlit lawn
Until the cold ironic dawn
Arises from her saffron bed—
When love is dead, when love is dead.

REMEMBRANCE

LET not the world remember you,
By any greater thing or less,
Than that upon a reed I blew
A song to praise your loveliness!

Let not the world remember me
(If immortality should crown
A line of verse, when empery
In the vast waves of time goes down)

By any greater thing or less
Than one good song I made and sung
To praise your love and loveliness,
One evening when the world was young!

CONQUERORS

CONQUEROR! What can withstand thy
patience, Time?

When granite summits crumble grain by grain,
And deserts gradually freeze with rime—

Our gates of brass are shut on thee in vain!

Conqueror! Who can outwit thy ambush, Death?
Thy sword-stroke through the Knight's strong
visor thrust

Shatters the pillar of life; none gainsayeth

Thy ravenous worms at work amid the dust!

Conqueror! greater than these, victorious Love!
Shall our glad lives hold aught else but thy
fire—

Since in a triumph they thy chariot drove

With Time and Death made captive to Desire?

HOLIDAY

WHEN every bird on every tree
Has sung with all its might;
When flowers amid the meadow grass
Are growing in the light—
Let every heart that leaps at play
Each butterfly a-wing,
Rejoice to see a holiday,
A holiday, a holiday,
A happy hearted holiday,
Because it is the Spring!

When Christmas snows are on the roof,
And little children sit,
Eating their puddings and their pies
Beneath the candles lit—
Since God was born on Christmas day,
Let every girl and boy,
Ring all the bells of holiday,
Of holiday, of holiday,
The jolly bells of holiday,
That fill the world with joy.

My love and I in autumn woods
Sweet scented from the rain

HOLIDAY

Once wandered for a holiday,
A holiday, a holiday,
 When love went with us all the way,
 And led us back again.
And though no Christmas snows that morn
 Lay on the fields so green,
Yet God within our hearts was born
 The little lamb of God forlorn—
Because it was a holiday,
A holiday, a holiday,
The holy day of holiday,
 When love was in us born.

UNUTTERED

SHADE in the garden,
Light on the hill
Mirror your nature's
Beautiful will.

Silence and solitude
Grow perfect and pass,
As you come to me laughing
Over the dew-wet grass.

But how shall I utter
Your loveliness,—
When the wind makes music
With your rustling dress?

What song of my singing
Shall clothe you about,—
When night wraps you in silver
As the stars come out?

How shall I emulate
The nightingale,—
Who melts you with tenderness
In the moonlit vale?

UNUTTERED

Love in its anguish
Strives and is dumb,
Waiting for fitting
Words to come;

Climbs in a spiral
Upward and on
Till the last lamp of the world
Flickers and is gone;

Till the last star is quenched
Below in the sky;
Till we stand in immensity,—
You and I;

Till we tread the ethereal
Rapturous ways,
And in heavenly language
I tell your praise.

MARRIAGE

SEEING what mighty men are turned to car-
rion,

I well may marvel at the audacious glove
I flung in challenge, and at the ringing clarion
I blew against the battlements of love.

What ardours are they that should so embolden
A man, that he can go up with dauntless breath,
To burst the gates of life which though they be
golden
Are stronger than the iron doors of death?

Now, turning back, I stand agape with wonder,
Knowing the thing unwittingly I dared—
The blasphemy unanswered by the thunder,
The Blade in scabbard and the blade unbared.

For I have wrenched the gates and pillaged the
city,
A ruined heaven amid the ravaged skies,
Only to find unfathomable pity
Mute and unforgettable within your eyes.

Loudly I shouted in my fantastic folly,
Threatening Paradise with a pigmy sword—

MARRIAGE

A hearth and firelight, mistletoe and holly
God gave me as ironical reward.

Little I recked, who now behold with amazement
The perilous journey that my soul has come,
The vengeance heaven has taken of sweet abase-
ment,
The house where my soul, being satisfied, is
dumb.

The love we seize and the love that we surrender,
These are no longer separate but the same—
For all the comforting air we breathe is tender
With all the loveliness of Love's matchless
name.

DIVORCE

(Written in Separation)

NOW that I know that Chance can tear
Our lives a little while apart,
When I embrace the empty air,
Who fain would hold you to my heart—

I deeplier know a deeper thing
Than even this dividing sea,
That cuts, as with a sabre-swing,
The single selves of you and me.

Beneath the shadow of divorce
Our separated bodies lie:
Dearest, we are one flesh. No force,
No fate our vows can nullify.

Around us little lusts decay,
And undevoted pleasures tire,
And satisfaction eats away
The nerve and sinew of desire.

We know that come what may of ill,
What shame may stain, what storm may shake
Our frail mortality—that still
Our mortal words shall never break.

DIVORCE

There is no ocean strong enough
To drag our plighted honour down,
Which carries on great tides the love
That many waters cannot drown.

FOR M. F. A. M.

Born March 24th, 1919.

NOT only names but armour
Do I gird upon
The tiny breast and shoulders
Of my new-born son.

Michael for the captain and leader
Of God's glorious host,
Who rides to battle with the sword
Of the Holy Ghost.

Felix for the Roman martyr
Who drank of doom,
As gaily as men drink of red wine
In a supper-room.

Antony who preached to the fishes
Alive in the brook,
To whom, while he read, the Child Jesus
Came out from his book.

Not only names but armour
Have I girded on
The tiny breast and shoulders
Of my new-born son.

MICHAELMAS DAY

(Written for my little son's first patronal feast.)

THOUGH heavenly anvils forge their swords
For your last spiritual campaign;
Though muster the seraphic lords
Against the mustering hosts profane;

And though you pass in long review
Your spearmen in their regiments,
Marking the bows as you pass through,
The disposition of the tents—

Yet (giving what the time allows
From horsemen and from charioteer)
Bend down your bright and burning brows;
To lesser matters lend an ear.

A silence in the skies be made,
A pause before the clash of war,
Ere grapple armies now arrayed
Celestial and secular. . . .

My little son—to whom I gave
Your name, angelic general—
Stand close beside him, quick to save,
To hold his spirit lest it fall.

MICHAELMAS DAY

Your sword bestow its accolade
Upon his shoulders; may he wear
Divinely smithied mail; a blade
Of righteous anger let him bear.

Among all men of women born,
May he be signed upon the breast
With heraldry of blazing scorn,
With honour gleaming at his crest.

With gentleness and chivalry
Be he endowed; and may he keep
Unspotted faith and chastity
Till God give his beloved sleep.

Then, Michael, bear him in your hands,
His stainless sword and shield and plume;
And stand beside him when he stands
To plead upon the Day of Doom.



PART III

SONNETS FROM AN UNFINISHED SEQUENCE

I

IN those far solitudes where Beauty dwells,
I heard you faintly ringing like a chime
O'er twilit waters; and the distant bells
Accorded with my heart as rhyme with rhyme.

Then, cried I, by that elfin music blest,
"Although I know not who or where you are,
Now know I that my heart shall come to rest
On yours at last beneath a happy star!"

But night came down and I grew sore afraid
Because the darkness silenced all the bells;
And in the tangled thickets of that glade
I trod the labyrinths of seven hells. . . .
Until the day-star brought the carillon
And made the belfry tremble into song.

II

When my heart's door in answer to your knocks
Creaks on its rusty hinges, you will come
Across the portals, darling paradox,
Who are to my awakened life its sum

SONNETS FROM UNFINISHED SEQUENCE

And summit, signal, starting-mark and goal,
 Its sword and armour, spur and golden prize—
A gallant gonfalon unto the soul
 Who learns of honour from your humble eyes!

You are all beauty in epitome—
 Feather from Gabriel's archangelic wing!
Laughter and pain, delight and sanctity
 Walk with you, through your vagrant wander-
 ing—
Who carelessly give what God, ere time began,
Wrote as His blessing for one lonely man.

III

If love be fixed beyond the reach of Fate;
 If Time's compelling summons and his sway
 Extend not to the lovers who obey
A greater lord; if evil days abate
No smallest tittle of their dear estate;
 If treason cannot trip them in the way;
 If deadliest dooms must make a vain essay
To batter down love's barred and bolted gate—

Then even of this hath love such potency,
 That woes his subjects the more closely knit

SONNETS FROM UNFINISHED SEQUENCE

And strengthen them in their adversity.

But only lovers know the truth of it,
Who, looking upward through the deep night, see
The sky with all its blissful tapers lit.

IV

You, whom my hands have clothed and crowned
with praise,

Have charged your poet lover that he write
Some word to tell how often there alight
The bitter moods of your ungracious days
Upon your gracious heart—when all your ways
Are set with snare and ambush; when, despite
Your published honour, you yourself unite
To treasonous folly that your worth betrays.

Thus will I write it: generous and unjust,
As I have known you, sweet—capricious, true
And fickle in a breath—with flame and dust
Mingled together—seraph, saint and shrew
In equal parts—brave, palsied with mistrust—
Pitiful, cruel—such, my sweet, are you!

V

No need has this deep love in me to speak
Of you with fair and flattering falsity,

SONNETS FROM UNFINISHED SEQUENCE

Yet honour lays its difficult charge on me
That I among your imperfections seek
(Please God and find it, too!) your perfect, meek
And ardent soul. This for an augury
I held, since one dim evening suddenly
I saw your goodness naked on your cheek.

With more than regent Spring's amazing green
The woods, since then, have been to me aflame;
From mystery you drew away the screen;
The world began and ended when you came;
And sworn to newer fealty, O my Queen,
The herald winds were clamant with your
name!

VI

When our gay hearts have laid their glories down;
When our young bodies mingle with the dust
From which God made them tender and august;
When I my singing robe and you your crown
Have yielded up to wasting moth and rust;
When even in our own familiar town
Men mind not our mortality, I trust
Our lives to live in more than their renown.

SONNETS FROM UNFINISHED SEQUENCE

For in our children's children love shall be
Nobler for all the mighty love we knew;
Holier for pity that has stirred in you,
Stronger for patience that has grown in me;
In unborn lovers shall our love renew
Its mystery and magnanimity.

VII

When beauty doffs its mortal vestiture
Wherewith its lovely spirit was arrayed;
When time has dissipated light and lure
From every golden head of every maid,
Whose body with the loathly worm is laid;
When these triumphant glories prove unsure
How shall it fare with you? When these de-
cayed
Shall your weak flesh contrive that it endure?
Lady, you are much greater than all those
Who used their beauty in their power and
pride—
Though such sad beauty be to you denied:
For carried through the dark a lantern goes,
And even now I see you glorified—
As you shall be when all the graves uncloze.

SONNETS FROM UNFINISHED SEQUENCE

VIII

Beyond the accidents of time and sense
Love's dim mysterious godhead strangely lies—
Hidden from all but faith's illumined eyes.
What ear shall hear his ringing eloquence?
What probing finger draw his substance thence?
But we may sup the wine that satisfies,
And smell the Mystic Rose. The flesh that
dies
May hold the deathless soul's magnificence.

Adulterous race of Scribe and Pharisee,
Shall any sign be given you to prove
The risen body—or the mystery
That eats love's flesh and drinks the blood
thereof?
Or any comfort save the blasphemy
Which is the living gospel of our love.

PART IV



ANNUNCIATION

NOW doth the chilly earth receive again
Release from her long servitude to pain;
For all the snows upon the frozen hills
Melt, and descend exultant to the plain.

Now o'er the earth a dress of green is cast
Where'er the feet of Gabriel have passed;
The woods and hedges quicken with their bloom
Which winter had imprisoned and made fast.

Through every trunk to every budding shoot
The sap is rising into flower and fruit;
And, prophesied by Sybil and by seer,
A rod is growing out of Jesse's root!

The annunciant angel bends upon his knee
Before the virginal maternity
That shall redeem the world! In equal joy
The new leaves burst from shrub and bush and
tree!

For loveliness and laughter, these are hers—
The early blossoms and the wind that stirs
Among them and along the meadow grass!
The sun and moon are her bright ministers!

ANNUNCIATION

The lark for happiness that sings aloud,
The open sky, the white, soft-breasted cloud
Unite to praise her name, with all the stars
That stand upon the heavens in a crowd.

Obedient to benignant Law's behest,
The mating birds build cunningly their nest
Wherein to welcome soon their unborn young—
And Mary walks with God beneath her breast!

Now nature joins with her in wondering
How could be brought to be this marvellous thing:
A child conceived of her sweet maidenhood—
Prime miracle of this miraculous Spring!

Now from a thousand woodlands notes there
throng,
The echoed notes of her celestial song,
Rehearsal of their own *Magnificat*;
"For He hath from their seats deposed the
strong;

"Broken the bands of winter on the earth;
The humble hath exalted; filled the dearth
Of hunger!" Shall not all the world be glad
With Mary, hearing of the promised birth?

ANNUNCIATION

The whole creation rises up to bless
Its God, in her amazing sinlessness

Crying, "My soul doth magnify the Lord,
Who looked upon His handmaid's lowliness!"

And when the waking spring shall symbolise
Her Spirit's exaltation and surprise—

If our eyes should be open, we may see
The Holy Ghost Who shines within her Eyes!

SIMPLICITY

To that to which a thing cannot attain by its own nature, it must be directed by another; thus, an arrow is shot by the archer towards a mark. Hence, properly speaking, a rational creature, capable of eternal life, is led towards it, as it were, directed by God.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS,
Part I, Question XXIII, Art. I, of the Summa.

THE heavenly Archer an arrow shot,
Speeding it straight on its splendid course,
Till it hit the mark of the centre spot,
And dug deep in with eager force.

Thus is the soul feathered safe and true,
Unswerved by the wind nor falling wide,
Obeying the Archer's eye and thew
And seeking no other mark in pride.

But give the arrow a mind and will;
Does it fly as shot from the loosened string?
Can the seasoned bow and the Archer's skill
Direct the wild and wayward thing?

If distracted by complexity,
A hundred targets it seeks at once,
Is God at default in His archery?
Shall He or the arrow be thought the dunce?

SIMPLICITY

If simple and single the arrow yield
 To the heavenly bow and heavenly aim,
It shall split the wand across the field
 And win the honours of the game!

MEEKNESS

UPON the Cross, as on a bed,
He lay; and not a word He said—
A lamb as to the slaughter led.

What pride can stand against such meekness?
What strength can overthrow such weakness?

“Thy will not mine accomplished be”—
But more than pain accepted He
Between the thieves on Calvary.

His loneliness and dereliction
Is Agony's complete perfection.

Then rang across the fearful sky
The blasphemous and bitter cry,
Lama, Lama Sabacthanai!

Darkened the sun; the moon was shaken
To see their God by God forsaken.

For never since the world began
Had God forsaken any man—
Till Christ was laid beneath His ban—

When by the Father unbefriended
The stricken Son to hell descended.

MEEKNESS

No consolation could He have
Who bore our sins our souls to save,
Who passed, unanswered, to the grave.

What pride can stand against such meekness?
What strength can overthrow such weakness?

PATIENCE

Take heed and be quiet; fear not, neither let thine heart be faint . . . because Syria hath counselled evil against thee. Ephraim also, and the son of Remaliah.

Is. VII, 4-5.

LET patience have her perfect work,
Whose strength in quietness shall be—

Though eyes are bandaged lest they see
Their God amid the desolate murk.

Though the abyss should ope its brink
Yet headlong I shall never sink—
If patience hath her perfect work.

Syria and Israel with their kings,
Two tails of smoking firebrands, flared;
But strong in hope my spirit dared
Accomplishment of hopeless things.

For with my broken strength renewed
I do not fear your bitter feud,
Syria and Israel and your kings!

For if the God of patience gave
Such years of patience unto one
Who stoned the prophets of His Son,
And slew the Son as a shameful Slave—
How patient must I be with Him,
In all His dealings strangely dim,
For all the patience that He gave!

TEMPERANCE

WHAT judgment and authority
Must hold the balanced mean,
Hung on a hair, so daintily,
A difficult point and keen—
The weight will drop beneath the touch
Of one small grain of dust too much!

A perilous adventure this
To which our feet are led,
The line 'yond which our joy and bliss
Are snared and surfeited—
Let not a coward soul aspire
To gain a satisfied desire.

Yet foolish he who would forego
The use, for fear abuse
Should lure him to his overthrow—
For such an one must lose
The honour and the hearty zest,
Attendant always on the quest.

No easy thing he may expect,
No beaten road and tame,

TEMPERANCE

Who seeks to save a heaven wrecked
By hell's infernal flame,
When virtue armoured *cap-à-pie*
Rides out with Law and Liberty.

CHASTITY

OUR hearts grow old, and of experience
They come at last to tire,
Longing in vain for their lost innocence
And for a new desire.

We see it in a child's unclouded eyes
As their most lovely grace,
And are abashed when that strange aura lies
Upon a human face.

Yet such are relative, for to the fruit
Eve stretched her hand and ate—
In one alone is seen the Absolute,
Surnamed Immaculate.

The beasts, unconscious of a mystery,
Can freely take their fill:
But man is troubled by virginity,
Whose hunger haunts him still.

O, good and evil mingled in that bough
Among its clustered gold!
O, sweet and bitter banquet then as now!
O, hearts grown grey and old!

CHASTITY

O, blessed paradox of pain and loss!

O, Phoenix from the fire!

O, heavenly ore refined from human dross!

O, innocent desire!

THE MANICHEE

WOULD you then shatter the mould of the
universe?

Shake off the dust
Of this evil world from your feet with a curse;
Its laughter and lust
Break through as a fetter; and seek a release
For your dungeoned soul?
Wing straight to impalpable regions of peace?
Be at one with the whole
Of the pure and ethereal spirit that moves
Through time and the deep?
Know for treacherous shadows the dreams of
loves
Born of life's sleep,
Where (paradox!) consciousness blindly descends
On flesh for a spell,
Making havoc of will, when the Absolute ends
Our heaven in hell?"

"Can you tell such as I where such seeming may
be,
Draw the curtain, unfold
The secret of rapture, point the pathway for me
To the city of gold

THE MANICHEE

Lying firm on eternity—pinnacles, spires
Upthrusted in air,
Gates broad to my entering?"

“Leave your desires!
Know ugly for fair! . . .
Consider the lazar’s foul suppurate skin,
His desolate eye—
Is he less for his sores? Is his spirit within
Less perfect thereby?
Let him scorn his material ills, nor perplex
The powers of his mind
With anguish for sins. If mortality vex,
Let him push it behind!”

“What if in reaching to God—to Him you de-
clare—
The soul should reject
The aids He has left us, the many-runged stair
Which the senses erect—
See not or touch not or hear not with awe
The glory bestowed
In the good of the earth; lose by breaking the law
The use of the road?”

THE MANICHEE

“Crass folly! Mind tangled and snared in the net
By her pinioned wings
In a sensual bondage—arise and forget
Earth’s loveliest things—
Not as types to be taken, as some will aver,
To an archetype hid
In the chaos of God, where no movement can stir
That pure darkness amid.
The glittering world was contrived in deceit,
To allure and betray,
By the Lord of the Pit—that man’s journeying
feet
Might wander astray.
Yet while bound to the body, man freely may pass
Secure and exempt
From the woes of the flesh—for since flesh is but
grass,
The devils that tempt
His body to joy, be they not overcome
(Let him strive if he can!)
No matter!—they shall not detract from the sum
Of the stature of man!
Hence to conclude, let him play if he will
With the figment of flesh;

THE MANICHEE

His scorn for its wiles brings escape from the ill
And its power to enmesh.

Does he fear what is impotent, worthless? Mis-
trust

Shakes his soul like the wind.

But let him despise in the using of lust—

His body has sinned

While the soul is untouched by——”

“The soul is maligned .

By the doctrine you preach—

Which makes it much less than God made it! O
blind,

Can your fingers not reach,

To the marvellous triple-fold nature of man,
Conjoined of soul

And spirit and body, whose parts cannot span
The depth of the whole.

For soul working upwards gains through its allies
Wide kingdoms of joy,

Attained through the zest of the mind and the
eyes

Which the flesh may employ.

And flesh touching a feather or leaf or a clod,
With a voice in its ears

THE MANICHEE

Of challenge, comes up to the threshold of God;
Slips past the sharp spears
Of the sentinel angels who cannot withstand
The force of that word
(Though it be but a man's). For as in a green
land

Rings the song of a bird,
So sweet shall man's speech be in God's ears, and
climb

To the roof of His throne,
Whether uttered by sweat or by war, or by rhyme
Or chiselled in stone!

And if by man's labour is worship expressed,
When he eats or he drinks
God's will he fulfils, as in beating his breast
For his sins,—then methinks

The world has its ritual also, for night
And the vestmented sun
Perform in the view of the cosmos their rite;

The fruitful hills run
Abounding with symbols and signs of His power,
When the scattered seed dies,
To rise in its spring from the dead with the power

THE MANICHEE

For which death was the price.
So God shall accept what the grateful earth brings
As praise to His name,
And through channels of all the material things
Blow his quickening flame.
From out of the wheat takes He flesh, from the
vine
His chalice of blood;
Man's service confirms He with oil for a sign;
And laves in the flood
Of the rivers and fountains man's primal dark
sin—
Conveying His grace
By these (you say evil) means, drawing man in
To the peace of His face.
Beyond such explicit outpourings of love,
His blessings are shed,
Borne on the invisible wings of the Dove,
To the sweet marriage bed
Of those who (a blasphemy) learn to attain
With a clasp and a kiss!
Like the brute and the bird they will eat, yet are
fain
Of the summits of bliss.

THE MANICHEE

They will reach what they seek for (let this be
the test!)

By their senses' desire,
And find hidden in lips and the curve of the breast
Heaven's mystical fire.

So if his Creator has thought it no shame

That a man should rejoice

In the beauty of woman—give praise to His
name,

Exultant in voice!

One word ere my *Credo* is brought to a close:

Though your eyes may be sealed

To the loveliness fresh every day on the rose

Or the grass of the field—

Despising (it may be) the moon and each star

Alight in the skies

Which you scorn as impostures, though noble they
are—

God open your eyes,

If for only an instant, to see a Child laid^{*}

Asleep on the straw,

While oxen adore Him, the Son of the Maid,

And kneel in their awe;

THE MANICHEE

While the angels proclaim to the listening earth
That God has been born,
That the Word is made flesh. . . . Go and weep
in your mirth,
At the end to your scorn!

THE IMAGE OF GOD

THIS is the tale of His creations: first
When from the dust of earth, not yet ac-
curs'd,
He fashioned man. Next when from God there
burst—

Breathed as a sigh—a singing star, a soul,
Wherewith man might perceive, desire, control
His destiny, conform unto the whole

Transcendent purpose of his place on earth:
Bring forth his kind to uncorrupted birth,
Touch God in mystery, and Eve in mirth.

But when the plan was shattered by the taste
Of sweet revolt, the Image was defaced
And Eden with a sword was made a waste.

Long æons through, God strove by pestilence
And prophecy to bring to penitence
Him who had lost his ancient innocence.

Long æons through He failed (though man was
His,
Marked with the Godhead's mark, with tears and
bliss,
Disquietude and arts and silences);

THE IMAGE OF GOD

Until, reversing His frustrated plan,
He broke Himself the barriers of His ban—
Since man escaped Him, God became a man.

This was the third creation: born a Child.
The soul of man with God was reconciled,
The soul defiled with flesh the undefiled.

(For in His childish wailings were implied
His human pain and weariness, the wide
Lent of temptation—and the Crucified.)

Lastly the body was redeemed when He
Shattered the gravestones piled immovably:
This mortal put on immortality.

But we know nothing of our past; we guess
At what we were; our troubled longings bless
Our hearts with happiness and homesickness.

Nor can our keen imaginations say
What we shall be; none knows the secret way
Our flesh shall walk on Resurrection Day.

Yet are we comforted by mystery,
The promise of perfection—for we see
Man taken up into the Deity.

BALLAD OF CHRISTMAS NIGHT

WILL you open to a lost stranger?"
I cried, as I knocked on the door.
"Will you open to one who has wandered
Three hours and more on the moor?"

No answer replied to the darkness,
Save the steady drip of the rain.
But I, who saw light through the keyhole,
Knocked again . . . again. . . .

Then one spoke and bade me enter.
"I know not the way I roam."
And a young girl spoke to me gently,
"Here all men are at home."

In the rays of a single lantern
A child wrapped in swaddling clothes I saw,
An old man, and stalls of cattle
That bit at the bundles of straw.

The girl's eyes gave me welcome
To that stable cold and dim.
Her lips said, "Sir, are you one who has come
To worship Him?"

BALLAD OF CHRISTMAS-NIGHT

“For your courtesy I thank you, lady,
In this stable cold and dim.
But what folly is this? Why should I kneel
And worship Him?”

“This is He Who is by highest heaven
Eternally adored. . . .
Unto us a Child is given,
Emmanuel, Christ the Lord.”

I laughed on hearing her folly;
I laughed at a thing absurd,
Believing not the word that was spoken
By the mother of the Word.

Then though the night was bitter
And sleet fell with the rain—
I left them as blasphemous fools, and went
Out into the night again. . . .

While I wandered the hills in the darkness,
Towards the break of day,
Shepherds cried, “Sir, we seek a new-born child
And his mother. Know you the way?”

I said, being hungry and angry,
“How should I know the way?”

BALLAD OF CHRISTMAS-NIGHT

Many a woman has borne a child
On Christmas Day!"

They only smiled, and answered,
"The child we seek is laid
In a stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes,
And is the son of a maid."

I laughed on hearing their folly;
I laughed at a thing absurd,
Believing not the word they had spoken
Or the mother of the Word.

And suddenly a multitude of angels
Sang, as they circled us,
Gloria in excelsis Deo
Et pax hominibus. . . .

I led the way back for the shepherds
To that stable cold and dim,
And wept as I said, "Lady,
We have come to worship Him."



PART V

TO THE EASTER DEAD (1918)

LET no lip call on sorrow! These abide
Immortal this heroic Easter morn
(O happiest, holiest hearts of women born!)
Who crowned our England with a deathless pride,
When in an hour ten thousand young men died
With simple valour and with simple scorn;
When from the fields of battle, red and torn
Above the guns the voice of glory cried:

They are not dead who rendered up their breath
In this tremendous agony of bliss!
They are not dead; No shadow summoneth
Their shining souls to its obscure abyss!
They are not dead whom an undying death
Hath married to herself with such a kiss!

TO FRANCE

O MISTRESS of the vine and song and dance,
Who knows thee only in thy revelry,
Knows not the majesty that dwells in France—
Guardian of honour and of liberty!

To thy great fashioning all great things come:
Laughter of Rabelais and the Maid's lance
hand;

The saints and poets of our Christendom,
Were melted for the minting of thy land.

The tumbrils full of cargoes of high kings
Creaked slowly up the long and dreadful way,
When, grown as vain as fools' imaginings,
The world was burnt as stubble in a day.

Still in the air thy lordly eagle sits,
Who fears no heat or light of any sun;
Did he not spread his wings o'er Austerlitz,
Where ended what at Valmy was begun?

Can one thing from the earth's strong story thrive,
While stands the granite of the black Bastille—
Or if that France that kept our souls alive,
Be trampled by the proud barbarian's heel?

THE PARADOX OF VICTORY

(For the Fourth Anniversary of War.)

HOW shall we live who look, O Lord,
Upon the anger of Thy Face?
How shall we dare to draw the sword
Unless Thy Mercy give us Grace?

How shall we see Ithuriel's spear,
Or Michael's shield ablaze with stars,
Or watch the hosts go up, or hear
The challenges of Thy great Wars?

For we have sinned, and kept apart
The opposites that mix and run
Together—though within Thy heart
Pity and wrath are fused in one!

The dread ineffable I AM
To His confounding conflict goes:
The valour of the wounded Lamb
The roaring lion overthrows!

Oh, dark mysterious Irony
That laughs to scorn the mighty Kings,
And panoplies with victory
The last and least of earth's weak things!

THE PARADOX OF VICTORY

But Thou despite our weary pride
Didst give us—O Magnanimous!—
A cause for which our young men died
And brought our honour back to us:

To us, grown sick with years of ease,
Thy loud and ringing summons came,
With passion lovelier than peace,
With folly nobler than our fame.

But humble us that we may win
Our glorious goal of enterprise;
Lest, unrepentant of our sin,
We lose the vision in our eyes.

THE LAST CRUSADE

BEHOLD a paradox! The crescent moon
Above these holy hills is on the wane,
Where once the shuddering, awe-struck sun at
noon

Hid his bright face before a young man slain!

Here for redemption of the sepulchre,
Wherein the murdered Prince of Life was laid,
Crusaders rode and sang the name of her
Who gave the Word His body from a Maid.

Lewis the Saint of thorns and knotted cord
Here failed, although his heart grew clean and
large;

Yet honour glittered on a Christian sword
When Richard led his barons to the charge.

Now is attained the goal of fruitless years;
And from their graves the royal ghosts arise,
And marshal horsemen with invisible spears
And happy hunger in their hollow eyes.

For in that quiet town of Nazareth—
Where heaven was conscious in a growing boy,

THE LAST CRUSADE

Walked its white streets, and drew of human
breath

Ere Golgotha made an end of Mary's joy—

The last crusade, on this heroic day,

The banners and the arms of Christendom
Carries to victory, while the nations pray,

“Thy kingdom come on earth, Thy kingdom
come.”

THE CITY OF THE DEAD

BENEATH your carven cross of stone,
Lie still within your house of clay,
In this grey city, all your own. . . .

Above amid the light of day,
Men trudge their dull and dusty round,
And count their gold and sell their shame,
While you in glory underground
Live with an unforgotten name.

O ghosts of all the million dead
Whose hearts are empty and forlorn
For women you can never wed
And children never to be born—
Remember that your sacrifice
Has brought a ransomed world to birth,
And that your dying was the price
Of all the good that lives on earth.

Remember that the soil you keep
Is English soil, the soil of home,
The silent city of your sleep
Renowned like Athens or like Rome—

THE CITY OF THE DEAD

For we remember it, and hold

 The sacred graveyards where you lie
As English as the wood and wold

 You loved before you came to die!

THE NEW WORLD

WITH what strange markings shall the world
arise?

Made new and lovely to our waiting eyes?
Or stagger forth decrepit, grey and old,
Among a crowd of men whose hearts are cold
With love of gain and luxury and ease?
Shall we adventure on heroic seas
And find a new Atlantis in the main—
Or pass, our ardent agonies grown vain,
Into a night of dense obscurity
Oblivious of our splendid history?

But I who sing where the two roads divide
Of that dear hope for which our young men
died—

Freedom and honour made secure on earth—
Behold the vast titanic pangs of birth
Racking the body of the Universe;
And, seeing them, I know the apparent curse
Under whose ban we lie will pass away;
That even now the footsteps of the day
Thunder along the immemorial hills.

THE NEW WORLD

But, knowing it, I know our weary wills
Must gird themselves again with might, that we
May fit our souls to drink of liberty.

PART VI

SIX EPITAPHS

I

*For a Minor Poet who was disappointed in love and died of
grief*

Take up the carcase—all that's left of me—
And drown it in an undiscovered sea,
Or let the grass grow rank and forest-high
To cover up the lost grave where I lie.

For I can wish no man to find a trace
Of one who carried gladness on his face—
But who was conquered by the Fates at last,
And in a tumult of derision passed.

After he gave a lady all he knew
Of song, that his own true love might come true,
She soured his laughter into bitterness,
And changed his deep desire to deep distress.

Yet it is certain far beyond denial
That of the proffered love she made fair trial
Ere tossing it aside—Oh, ponder human!
What mould of man was this? What mould of
woman?

SIX EPITAPHS

II

For a Philanthropist, who, after a long and useful life, was impartially praised even by the newspapers which he did not own.

How shall the paupers' children learn to sneeze,*
How shall their parents fumigate their fleas,
If your advising tongue now silent is
Down in the wide Cimmerian abyss?
Unless, indeed, you've taken (as we hope)
The Heights of heaven with a cry of SOAP!
And made the angels sing to harps of gold
Canticles nobler than they hymned of old,
Concerning destitution, lunacy,
And the bad effects of private charity—
Persuading God with your smooth eloquence,
That the present system of His Providence
Has grown defective in its working, and
Extremely difficult to understand;
And that it loudly calls for strict revision
By some expert Committee or Commission. . . .
If this be as we hope, then all is well
And King Beelzebub may laugh in hell—

* See the dead man's contribution to the Symposium entitled: "Parentage among the Poor," in which he describes and advocates the hygienic way of sneezing so as to minimise the risk of germ infection.

SIX EPITAPHS

For though to your celestial seat you've gone,
The social uplift still can carry on!

III

For a Housemaid, who overheard through a keyhole a Cabinet Minister at his devotions in Downing Street, and who died of the consequent shock.

Yours was the lot to carry up the stairs
Towels and shaving water, boots and coal—
But *not* to pry into the secret prayers,
The virgin whiteness of your master's soul.
Leapt with a dagger murderous surprise—
The shock, the struggle and the death-stroke
given!—
To hear those lips so used to telling lies
Professing faith before the throne of heaven.

IV

For a noble tree that was chopped down and sold by its ignoble owner.

You never feared the wind's strong charge and
clamour;
Rooted impregnably rock-deep you stood—
Till axes struck your heart as with a hammer
Before the quaking wood!

SIX EPITAPHS

O death magnificent! A sight for wonder!
Cataclysmic fell you as an Empire falls:
As when the boastful Greeks destroyed in thunder
Troy's tall, resplendent walls!

Yet shall your limbs be shaped to beam and rafter;
Bacon shall hang from you before a fire,
Where honest men may sit with ale and laughter
And all that they desire.

V

*For my Greatest Enemy, laying upon his foul body and
fouler soul what I think they deserve.*

Beneath this stone and this engraven verse
Lies one I still would follow with a curse.
I heap upon him in his dismal gloom,
A malediction to disturb his tomb:
May all the worms that eat his body bite
With teeth made bitter in the pools of night,
Sharp teeth and poisoned, that shall tear and burn
His loins and liver, heart and eyes in turn;
May decent people whiten in the face
To hear of spectres round his burial place;
And may the screech-owl chaunt a hideous tune

SIX EPITAPHS

Beside his grave beneath a blood-shot moon;
May the black horsemen halloo on their hounds
Till old men shudder at the dreadful sounds;
And may his soul taste not Lethean springs,
Which with oblivion ease the happenings
Of those infernal labyrinths, through which
Go the unlovely and the proud and rich;
But may this ringing curse torment him there
And plunge him deep and deeper in despair
So would I curse him—but the truth to tell—
There *is* no man I like not passing well.

VI

For Myself, written in an hour of monumental egotism.

Here is a man, unquestionably dead,
Of whom, when all the blackest has been said,
(And Lord! what lies and legends folks could tell
Of one whom duns and devils drove to hell—
Which is the reason, lest the world should laugh,
That he discreetly writes his epitaph!)

It may be claimed that to the very end
He kept the heart of every splendid friend,
And he had many; that he would not do
Some things—though he had vices not a few;

SIX EPITAPHS

That though despair closed in and held him fast
He kept his foolish courage to the last,
And joy alive . . . that much he well may claim
For this poor fellow who has borne his name.

PART VII

AN INSCRIPTION WRITTEN WITH A
NEW FOUNTAIN PEN USED FOR
THE FIRST TIME

TO what less worthy uses shall This Pen
Be driven when I take It up again?
But now with Its virginity I write
A sentence that shall keep your memory bright.
If afterwards It lose Its Eden, falling
To disrepute and infamy appalling,
Yet Its existence has been justified
(If only for an instant). For with pride
It well may ponder in base dotage: *Song*
For one glad moment did to me belong
And I—I swell to think of it—once moved
To praise the lady that my master loved.

THE DENIAL

DENYING beauty, on we go and on
Into the sandy desert of the mind
Where no tree grows, no fruitful thing or kind.
The mirage of reality is gone
The instant that we look at it. We find
No resting-place. The moon that last night shone,
The naked moon has no pavilion
In which to hide. The sun has made us blind.

The sun can cast no shadow on the grass.
No moonlight trembles through the twisted
boughs.
All is as blatant and as bright as brass,
A clarity without perspective. Lost! . . .
Amid a wilderness without a house . . .
Stripped of the mysteries of clouds and frost!

A FISHERMAN'S STORY

IN waters deep and dim
The fishes glance and glide,
Or by the lake's green rim
 'Neath roots of rushes hide.

They rise to snatch a fly;
 They leap into the air:
The ripples fade and die
 And are not anywhere.

I steal my fingers in;
 I touch a gleaming scale,
A swift, elusive fin,
 The flicker of a tail.

Sometimes (more luck than skill!)
 I bring a live fish out,
My happy fingers thrill
 With gold-fish or with trout.

But oh, the fish I lose!
 The silver scales and gold!
The thousands in the ooze
 For every one I hold!

BALLADE OF BEELZEBUB

IT'S not that you've been rude to me a bit—
Indeed, your charming courtesies compel
My clumsy thanks, and all the rest of it.

I've dined at your expense; the Muscatel
Was excellent and had no parallel.

I never tasted better Caviare;

But (pardon me for using doggerel)
But who the devil do you think you are?

I recognize your aphoristic wit.

Your grammar's good; and you can even spell.
Infinitives by you are never split;

And you can turn a sonnet very well.

At ballades, why, at ballades you excel
(I wish I did!); I'd have to travel far

To find a smarter literary swell—
But who the devil do you think you are?

I'd like you better rising from the Pit

With horns and cloven hoofs and horrid yell—
Than here, where the electric light is lit,

And where a button somehow rings a bell
In this luxurious up-to-date hotel—

BALLADE OF BEELZEBUB

The smoke that's curling from your good cigar
Dispells the brimstone's more obnoxious
smell—

But who the devil do you think you are?

ENVOI

Prince of the Darkness, Lord of hate and hell,
Who dropped from heaven blazing like a star,
You say you've heard I have a soul to sell . . .
But who the devil do you think you are?

BALLADE OF A LOST ROAD *

IT was in ways beset with gloom,
Where tangle branches overhead
Of trees whereon no blossoms bloom
Save those which are already dead,
That some malignant spirit led
My steps astray, and did entice
Me down to where all hopes are sped—
I lost the road to Paradise.

Calamitous that day of doom
When Eden's apples glistened red,
And Eva whispered to her groom
Of what the lying Serpent said!
O, sour the fruit on which they fed—
Which they had thought as sweet as spice!—
When Eden was untenanted
I lost the road to Paradise.

* This ballade was written, with a refrain agreed upon by us, in a poetic bout with Mr. Charles Williams. It is hardly necessary to say that his was a much better ballade. St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas Aquinas were commissioned to write an office for the newly instituted Feast of *Corpus Christi*. When the two doctors came to read their versions to the adjudicating commission the lot fell to St. Thomas to read his version first. As he reached each new part of the office St. Bonaventure tore his own version up, so that when St. Thomas had reached the end, all St. Bonaventure had to show was a pile of pieces that had been his manuscript.

I should have followed his example—but alas, I am not a saint!

BALLADE OF A LOST ROAD

I sat within the Upper Room;
'Twas I who took the sop of bread;
I sealed the ineffective tomb;
I trembled for my skin and fled;
I stood and mocked Him while he bled;
And for His coat I rattled dice;
I tore it into strip and shred;
I lost the road to Paradise.

ENVOI

Prince of the Portals, I have plead
With naught of cunning or device—
My rags of poor excuse are shed—
I lost the road to Paradise.

BEAUTY BENEATH WHOSE HAND . . .

BEAUTY, beneath whose hand we make
All that is noble in our lives,
When passionate desires awake
And will, grown energetic, strives—
We hear the doom and dread decree
Thou sendest forth to pleasure thee.

Denied and dear and perilous!
Our first, our last, our mightiest love!
Brooking no rival, tyrannous—
As all thy votaries can prove—
Who, loving thee, have lived and died
With their desire unsatisfied.

We choose thee—and thou sendest pain;
We seek thee—and thou tarriest long;
Thou takest toll of nerve and brain,
And tears are in our happiest song;
Our hopeless ardours are content
Rewarded by their punishment.

But they who fainted in the quest,
Like those who bartered thee for gold,
Cry out from their unquiet rest,

BEAUTY BENEATH WHOSE HAND . . .

“Bring back, bring back the days of old
The days of rapturous agony!”
Be still. Decay. It may not be.

From pang to sharper pang we go,
With burning hearts and bleeding feet,
From woeful bliss to blissful woe—
Till Beauty, from her heavenly seat
Bends down to heal us, breaks her rod,
And blinds us with the face of God.

EPILOGUE

GREAT joy is his who has been doomed from
birth

To seek the glittering shadow of that
beauty

Which God has cast upon the minds of men,
Whereof He is at once the object shadowed,
And the intolerable light that casts
The semblance of itself upon the world.

Great joy is his, hunger unsatisfied,
An exultation o'er the thing discovered,
A fiercer exultation o'er the thing concealed
From his adventurous and happy heart.

For well he knows that his felicities
Of form and colour or of haunted music
Are but uncertain shadows of a shadow.
He chooses rhymes that he may make them ring
In correspondence with the eternal Word,
Like bells to answer those celestial belfries
Whose chimes he faintly heard in faded dreams.
His rhythms are the faltering counterpart
Of that ineffable beauty that declares
The orderings of intellectual law,
Self-evident, incomprehensible.

EPILOGUE

Great joy in his who finds in human love
The image of unconsummated bliss,
The peace of God that passeth understanding;
Whoever in his mortal marriage hungers
To eat the marriage supper with the Lamb,
According to his ardour is he aware
Of beauty perishable, inviolate—
Perishable as the fleshly husk decays,
Inviolatè spiritual virginity,
Which shall effect for body and for soul
A pure and perfect ravishment of desire.

Great joy is his, forever unsatisfied,
His happiness made sharp by lonely longing,
Until a blinding beauty burn his eyes
And cleanse his wild astonished heart with passion.

W 32 *

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